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ABSTRACT

Considering the issue of whether or not school boards should have separate staffs, three models are presented: a "two-hat" concept of metropolitan governance; a separate staff operating on a needs basis; and, the "federal model" with legislative, judicial, and administrative branches. These models raise two political questions: In routine, non-episodic decisions, does the board actually control policy? and, Is the board perception of the administration supportive or skeptical? Four power relationships become available to answer the questions--a "paternalistic" model, a "legitimize" model, an "enforcers" model, and a "reformers" model. The implications of whether boards should have their own staff raise philosophical and political meanings of school governance. Administration and board are institutional definitions, derived from the bureaucratic structure, and it is imperative to decide who makes policy. If actual policy is formed and implemented by decisions reached by competing professions, interest groups, and select individuals, then staffing in response to institutional definitions makes little sense. (Author/DW)

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SHOULD A BOARD HAVE STAFF OTHER THAN THE SUPERINTENDENTS STAFF?

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Presented at Clinic D-55, National School Boards Association, Miami Beach, April, 1975.

There would seem to be two very different reasons why a board might consider having staff other than the administrative structure; board staff could be used to help and compliment the management bureaucracy or inspect and watchdog its actions. In either case, the fuzzy distinction between what is policy formation and what is policy implementation will have to be clarified, causing radical considerations and disagreement. This talk explores the possible rationales, mechanisms and policy implications for conventional board arrangements which are raised in the idea of a separate staff.

1. The Fuzzy Definition of Policy Formation

From a legal definition of educational governance the question of who and how policy is formed seems simple. Public schooling is a state function (Morphet et al, 1967). Local jurisdictions are corporations with delegated authority which can be legally withdrawn at any time. However, the political realities of "local autonomy" tradition, built upon property taxation, has made drastic state control (except Hawaii) attempts an uncommon occurrence (see Herman 1963 in resistance to local district consolidation). A second political reality mitigating against the literal legal definition of state control is the growing effect of regional and federal governments upon local services (e.g., desegregation and ESEA title conformance mandates; sharing of specialized services on a regional or metropolitan basis--see Milstein, 1970).

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The issues surrounding legal definition of authority are also applicable to board - administrator policy relations at the local level. The legal delegation of state jurisdiction and hiring of the top administrator seems to guarantee the board's superordinate ability to define policy formation. However, the lack of concrete distinctions about policy role reflects that the board may, in reality, say little about the relative relationship between the administrators and lay representatives. First, since 1927 (Counts) it has been recognized that boards do not represent the general populace (Jennings and Zeigler, 1970),especially in urban areas. To rationalize lay legitimacy, boards must perpetuate the "myth of the unitary community" (Salisbury, 1967). This myth has been increasingly challenged by various, powerful interest claiming the "community" designation. No clearer challenge to the board's representativeness can be found when the conventional structure of governance has to be altered in response to political demands for decentralization. The delegation of decision authority from the hierarchial rationalizations (e.g., board as "head" of the bureaucracy - read unitary school system) to decentralized modifications such as community boards, is conscious recognition that traditional board legitimacy to form policy is removed in certain decision areas (Bundy, 1967).

A second challenge to the conventional,legal definition of a board's authority to form policy is the power of the administrative structure. Many writers have pointed to the political realities of expertise, socialization, continuity of the administrative staff and complexity of the schooling task as putting control of policy formation in the hands of the administrators (Kerr, 1964; Wiles and Conley, 1974; Gittell, 1967). Further, the administrative control of boards even remains in decentralized

school systems (Rebell, 1972; Williams and Wiles, 1973; Grant, 1969). According to these writers, the extent to which "political masters" form policy is constrainted by what the administrators wants them to handle. When community concern reaches the point of overt crisis "the professionals have usually handed the issue back to the board. For example, in big city integration crises, with no specific proposal or compromise among conflicting groups, boards have become the major political decision makers" (LaNoue and Smith, 1973; Crane, 1968). Integration is defined as a "social issue" that is more appropriate for board resolution (Wirt and Kirst, 1972). If it is true that administrators determine "appropriateness" of what issues are board concern (those with high political penalty) then the legal definition of policy formation takes on a very different meaning.

Finally, the fuzziness of policy formation is a function of the historical evolution of beard function. When public schools began, no administrators intervened, as the board itself was an executive body (e.g., township model, see Stanley, 1953). "From the chaos of this structure, a result of forming a special sub-committee for each new problem...the board was transformed into a legislative body. Now its function was to set broad guidelines and sit as watch dogs over their administration. But that function has been transformed in this century [so that]...now the board has become mediator or adjudicator among contending school faction..." (Wirt and Kirst, 1972, pg. 81). Some of the harshest critics would go beyond the mediation function, charging "rubber stamping" or complete irrelevance (Iannaccone 1967, pg. 65; Bendiner 1969, pg. 165). And this ultimate type of criticism is not reserved to the turbulent 1960's and the present. In the 1930's the abolition of lay boards was called for (Judd, 1934) and school boards described as "...

one of those instruments of tortuous propensities which, beaming with an unbecoming and reflected wisdom, wanders in a twilight zone between civic grandeur and political connivance." (Hodges, 1939).

The point of this discussion is to show that legal and strctural definition of policy role is, at best, inadequate. There is growing recognition that the conceptual and operational translation of"formation-implementation" distinctions reflect the political realities of a particular decision situation. This should color considerations of board role and the issue of staff additions.

II. Some Conceptual Rationales

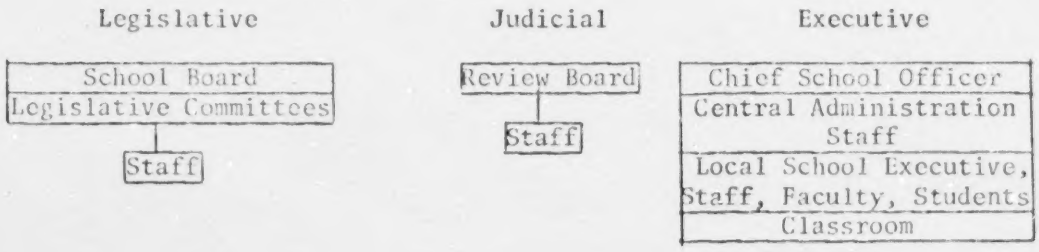
There are several conceptual examples available which could provide broad rationalizations for a school board staff. Several writers have distinguished the "two-hat" concept of metropolitan governance (Williams and Wiles 1973, Laverne 1974) which blurs administrator-lay representative functions, especially in specialized service areas. In the BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Services) of New York State, district superintendents could also become executive "officers" of specific BOCES services (Laverne 1974, p. 130). The breakdown of traditional administrative functions in terms of the bureaucratic hierarchy may allow present executives to exhibit characteristics of a board staff modification.

Another modification suggested by Pitt et al. (1974) is a Cooperative Educational Support Services Corporation (CESS) which "would have limited autonomous decision-making power; their operations would be on a fee-for-service basis with the district and local schools" (Pitt el al, pg. 169). This type of staff is not tied to the board or the administration but acts according to defined needs and functions.

Perhaps the most radical proposal for board staffing is the "federal model"

proposed by Kimbrough and Andes (1974). This example would "parallel the theory underlying the United States federal government, in that the organization would have a legislative, judicial and administrative branch." (Kimbrough and Andes, pg. 183) Figure one schematically illustrates this conceptual example.

Figure I. "Federal Model"



The school board would operate through legislative committees and special investigative committees. The legislative function would include determination of school policies, goals, operating procedures and appropriations. Presumably board staffs would conduct fact finding evaluations and proposal writing for the various legislative committees.

A form of board staffing could also be utilized in the judicial branch through the review board. Again, the staff would do "legwork" for the review board, which "would be responsible for adjudicating or mediating conflicts between the legislative and executive branches; between levels within the organization, between administrators and teachers and between school personnel and community groups" (Kimbough and Andes, pg. 184).

III. Some Political Realities

To approach the specific question of whether a board should have staff other than the administrative structure raises two issues of political reality for a particular school system: (1) in routine, non-episodic decisions does the board actually control policy? (2) is the board perception of the administration supportive or skeptical? Figure Two outlines four

basic typologies which arise from the interrelationship of key political questions:

Figure II.

ACTUAL POWER RELATIONSHIP

BOARD PERCEPTION OF RELATIONSHIP	Board Control	Administrator Control
Supportive	I "Paternalistic"	II "Legitimizers"
Skeptical	III "Enforcers"	IV "Reformers"

It is fair to suggest that all four typologies exist today in a variety of operational forms, that may have direct or indirect relationships to types of community power structures (Johns and Kimbrough, 1968), issue contexts (Bachrach and Baratz 1970), central office regimes (Kimbough 1968) or professional employee status (Corwin 1965). For this discussion of realities for staff, the board's perception of existing policy relations seems most important. The Board can support the administration when they are in actual control of making school decisions and when they are subordinate. When in control (Model 1) the board can be "paternalistic" with the administration. The professionals are "good ole boys" who carry out the wishes of the board members. In this model, "formation" of policy may encompass many administrative functions, such as the direct hiring and firing of staff or textbook selection. Administrators attempt persuade the board to set certain policy through elaborate documentations, non-public, one-on-one influence, or not at all (see Perry and Wildman's, 1971, discussion of "board control" model).

Boards can also be highly supportive of administration when they are clearly little more than a body for legitimization (Model 2). Kerr (1964), Cistone (1974), Prewitt (1970), and others have documented elaborate administrative socialization processes designed to make sure board members "know their place and love it." The primary policy role of the board in

Model 2 is to "defend the schools from 'outside' criticism and persuade citizens to open their pocketbooks" (Eliot, 1959).

As the turbulence of the 1960's has so vividly illustrated in many school systems, boards of education can be highly skeptical of their own administrative structure. Depending upon the crucial issue of actual control, skeptical boards may see themselves as enforcers or reformers.

Enforcers (Model 3) may view the administration as incompetent, out of date, or trying to subvert the boards policy intentions. These suspicions lead to direct political actions to control and guarantee implementation.

"Reform" boards, (Model 4) where board members have been selected on a "throw the rascals out" platform (Katz 1971), are a growing phenomena reflecting a lack of community trust in professional expertise, conventional education goals (expressed in existing programs and/or personnel actions) and a governance system capable of making change. Unlike other reform movements that periodically sweep through municipal governments, the "reform" school board members feel a lack of actual clout to accomplish their designated mission (Iannaccone and Wiles, 1971). Their frustration is translated into a constant type of adversary action to probe and eliminate weak links in the professional structure.

Once a school board has assessed the political issues of control and perceived satisfaction with existing relations, there are several operational examples for both supportive and skeptical boards.

IV. Some Operational Examples

There are several examples of which supportive boards may consider to help promote the administrative structure. Cronin suggests, "a variant (could) be to combine education with related 'human resources enterprizes'. Others would strengthen the board by building its separate research capacity. An 'evaluation' team, presumably with experts in program evaluation and cost

effectiveness . . . " (1970 pg. 170). Administrative fears of overlapping responsibilities could be somewhat overcome by pointing out school boards have hired external teams of system evaluators since 1911. The school survey teams, such as those led by George Strayer in the 1930's and 1940's, have evolved into the large management consulting firms (such as Booz, Allen and Hamilton) of the present. While external groups do not always legitimize existing governance arrangements, conclusions and findings are often supportive of present policy or provide time for adaptation (eg. "red starring" positions in overstaffed administrations). Perhaps the greatest value for board support is that external groups project the "objective outsider" image to critics of the present school structure. Further, their ad hoc nature could allow this type of board staff to make statements without bearing the political responsibilities of the same message coming in administrative pronouncements. This same function could be carried out by a board ombudsman who "has access to the system yet is not within it and who is a receiver of gripes, grievances, ideas and innovations" (Kimbrough and Andes, 1974 pg. 181). The use of such an agency by a supportive board would provide administrators "lead time" to prevent or defend against crisis demands.

Skeptical boards may establish their own staff to perform a "watch dog function", perhaps analogous to the U.S. Bureau of the Budget "which checks upon the agency staffs of every federal body and autonomous body . . . such an agency might force a superintendent and staff to justify programs, explain alternatives and secure board approval on a more rational basis" (Cronin 1970 pg. 171). If the board is in actual policy control its staff may then become an "inspectorate", functioning like a parlimentary branch such as the Ministry of Education.

If the administrative structure holds real power, the board staff may function like Nader's Raiders. The Nader network provides several operational guidelines for the establishment of an advocacy or "reform" staff organization. The Nader organization (Public Citizen Inc.) is presently composed of sixteen agencies, with an annual budget of 1.4 million dollars (exclusive of grants) and a staff of approximately 125 workers (augmented by approximately 175 part and full time volunteers and interns). The political evolution of Ralph Nader, a person taking on General Motors by book writing and deflamation suits, to the Nader Advocacy organization suggests several steps in reform school board staffing. First, the sixteen agencies of Public Citizen Inc. can be differentiated by general function, calculated to maximize clout at the public and "behind the scenes" levels of governance. The three basic arms of the network deal with the public relations, scholarly research and direct advocacy functions. Public relations, carried out by Nader himself and a storefront information service, emphasize the reform image: uniformity of the "consumer" as an agency of demand for change; the "personalismo" of Nader to reflect the incorruptable, the austere, the hard work ethic for those who govern; the crisis orientation to issues which force perceptual dicotomies in decision making ("love-hate", either-or). Any school board staff who will "watchdog" must systematically work at projecting the Nader public image or risk being damned with the same paintbrush of schooling critics who attack the administration. (And the fact there are few Ralph Naders who really believe and act out their public image may indicate how hard the "reform" perception is to create and hold).

A second arm of the Nader network deals in scholarly research (Center for Responsive Law) and, thus, provides the evaluations and arguments couched in academic legitimacy which can support political demands for reform. The long history of administrators who swamp part-time board members with mountains of statistics and elaborate rationalizations as "first tentative esti-

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mates" (Wiles and Williams 1973) shows why a reform board staff must fight fire with fire or run the risk of being judged "subjective", "irrational" or "uninformed".

The final arm of the Nader network deals with a variety of advocacy efforts, ranging from influencing Congress to pass legislation (eg. special interest in the bill to establish an Agency for Consumer Advocacy as an update to previous Consumer Protection Agency Attempts), scrutiny of various regulatory agencies, actual litigation action, formation of vested interest groups by need (eg. retired citizens) and by topic (tax reform, health research, public utilities, nuclear power). There is deliberate overlap and coordination in the Advocacy arm so that information gathering and citizen mobilization may form the backbone for litigation against a profession (American Medical Association) or lobby for a Congressman's vote. The staff of a skeptical school board may not evolve into extreme forms (eg. initiate a lawsuit in the name of "the people" against the teachers?), but the ability to translate thought into action seems imperative for directing board "reform" of administration. A final note for this type of board staff is in order. The advocacy agencies of the Nader organization are increasingly seeking a low-profile, behind the scenes type of influence which is in line with 1970's politics. The late 1960's was the age of overt exposure (eg. T.V.) dramatic exposé and allegiance to high ideals (eg. participatory democracy) to structure advocacy politics. The scarcities of the 1970's and the cumulative, psychological impact of Vietnam and Watergate work against legitimization of mass movements ("to the streets, power to the people") and lofty rhetoric (jobs not save humanity). Reform board staffs would probably have most success immulating the "underground, one-on-one" style of advocacy which allows the administrative structure to maneuver without yet another public

embarrassment. This does not mean the board staff has to join the "greasing of the squeaky wheel" type of action but recognize that, with limited political resources, the "hit-miss", wasteful broadsides should be replaced with concentrated focus on key linkages.

V. Implications

The implications of whether boards should have their own staff raises specific consideration of the philosophical and political meaning of school governance. Is the proper role of lay representative to support or scrutize the administrative structure? Is skepticism healthy or disloyal in defining policy choice? The meaning of board staff is merely a mechanistic reflection of this philosophic dilemma in questions of governance and control. Unfortunately, the traditional insulation of public schools forces crisis perspectives and may mitigate against the gradual evolution and resolution of policy "formation-implementation" distinctions.

At the operational level of politics, the basic implication centers upon identifying the true policy system in today's schools. Administration and board are institutional definitions, derived from the bureaucratic structure. It may be that considering who and how policy is made through this format is obsolete. A growing body of literature suggests that policy expertise and specialized competencies are defining the new bases of power which often have little correlation to bureaucratic stipulations (Benveniste, 1972, Davis 1974, Pattee, 1974). If actual policy is formed and implemented as a result of decisions reached by competing professions (eg. teachers, custodians), interest groups ("community control," "big business") and select individuals (eg. a consortium of "key" knowledgeable administrators and board members) then staffing in response to institutional definitions makes little sense. For example, as long as the Harvard lawyers in the Nader organization are pitting their skills and specialities against their

counterparts (also Harvard lawyers) in big business to determine policy, the meaning of being in or outside "the system" must also be altered. Perhaps it is this implication for staffing in general that should be of most urgent concern to board and administrative incumbents in today's public school system.

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Dear Ms. Hess,

Enclosed are two copies of the paper to be presented at Clinic D-55 this coming April. For media presentation, the most important points may be the discussion of political realities(page six), the Nader Raider concept for skeptical boards(pages nine and ten) and the implications for overall control(last paragraph page eleven and page twelve).

Cordially,

David K. Wiles
Associate Professor

February 18, 1975
encl.

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